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A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, horticulturist, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered through WRC and 37 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, September 30, 1930.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

How-do-you-do friends! I would like to have you join me today for a trip to the woods and pastures for the purpose of gathering our winter supply of native nuts. First, however, let us turn the calendar backward about 30 or 40 years to the time when some of us were boys and girls and before such native nuts as black walnuts and butternuts had found a place on our markets. Let us imagine that it is a hazy morning in late October and the scene the rolling hills of almost anywhere in the central or eastern States. With bags and baskets we make our way through pasture and woodland, scuffing the dry leaves with our feet as we go and occasionally inspecting a walnut or hickory nut tree on our way. We are intimately acquainted with every walnut tree in the neighborhood; the nuts of some are small, thickshelled, hard and with small, dark kernels. We do not waste time on them, but on we go to a large spreading tree that stands apart from the others and which we have long known for the size and quality of its nuts. Soon we gather the walnuts in small piles then by means of a heavy stick of wood we break the outer hulls and remove the walnuts, all the time trying to avoid getting our fingers stained by the juice in the hulls. With bags and baskets filled and staggering under our load we slowly make our way across the brook, then up the hill through the pasture and finally to the corncrib where the hulled walnuts were spread to dry upon the slatted floor of the empty crib. We gathered walnuts for our own use but who, in those days ever thought of gathering walnuts to sell.

I was talking with Mr. C. A. Reed of our office a few days ago about the good old days when we gathered walnuts, butternuts, hickory nuts, pecans and other nuts for home use, and he suggested that I give the folks of the Farm and Home Hour family a few pointers about the harvesting and marketing of native nuts in general and about black walnuts in particular. Mr. Reed has given the whole problem of utilizing our native nuts a lot of attention and he says that our native nut trees, especially in the northern and eastern portion of the country, offer an opportunity for farm families to acquire considerable income, but, he continues, the nuts must be gathered while in prime condition and be properly prepared for the market. He says that thousands of bushels of highly edible nuts annually go to waste in that portion of the country covered by the great Mississippi Valley and the Appalachian region and the middle Atlantic Seaboard. Other sections of the country have native nuts such as pecans and filberts that offer the same opportunity as a source of family income or pin money for certain individuals.

Mr. Reed says that the kernels of black walnuts and butternuts are in great demand, and that the kernels of both walnuts and butternuts, also the best hickory nuts, especially the shagbarks -- and shellbarks, are highly palatable and nutritious. Black walnut kernels, in particular, are now firmly entrenched in the markets of this country, and the present year may be one of

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the best in which to harvest and prepare these nuts for the market or for home consumption on the farm. Mr. Reed says that to obtain the highest prices for black walnuts or butternuts, the following points should be kept in mind:

1. Harvest the nuts as soon as mature. It may not be wise to wait until they fall from the tree, but in some cases they should be shook from the branches.

2. The second point is to remove the hulls promptly and do not allow the nuts to lie on the ground any length of time after they fall from the tree.

3. After the hulls are removed, cure the nuts somewhat. You can wash them in tubs of water, using a broom or stiff brush after which the hulled nuts will not be black but light in color.

4. The fourth point is to crack the shells and remove the kernels reasonably soon after shelling. Cracking is a job in which practically every member of the family can take part, and it is possible to do the work at home.

5. The fifth point is to grade the kernels into about five grades -- lights, darks, intermediates as to color, and then place all the small pieces in another grade and the crumbs in still another.

6. After cracking the nuts the kernels must be cured until they no longer feel moist to the hand before they are packed to be sent to the market.

7. Barrels, wooden boxes, or strawboard boxes lined with waterproof paper are used for shipping the kernels, but they should not be packed until immediately before shipment and as soon as received by the buyer the boxes should be opened and the kernels spread out where they can be inspected frequently. Do not ship the kernels in bags.

But I am getting a little ahead of my story, and suppose we go back for a moment to the hulling of the nuts. I told you how we used to do it 30 or 40 years ago, but that process is too slow. The ordinary corn sheller used on many farms is probably the best machine available for taking off the hulls. As the nuts are hulled, place them in a tub of water and scrub them with a brush or broom as already suggested. The nuts may be handled with shovels or with forks which have their tines close together. Never place the nuts in piles or deep layers but spread them out on the barn floor or on trays where they will have plenty of air circulation. It is not a good idea to dry the nuts in the direct sunlight or at least they should be shaded a part of the day on extremely hot days.

Then it comes to curing the kernels after cracking, Mr. Reed says that it is advisable to use a little mild heat with plenty of ventilation, otherwise the kernels are liable to cake together and mold in shipment. Don't heat them too much, just enough to dry them out nicely. Very often this work can be done to advantage by the use of trays suspended over the kitchen stove.

Now what I have said about black walnuts applies to a certain degree to other kinds of nuts that grow wild in various parts of the country. The black walnut and the butternut are perhaps the most important, but in my event, here is a chance for some of you to make a little extra money this fall.